

WRITE YOUR OWN

FABLE



by Natalie M. Rosinsky

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Compass Point Books  Minneapolis, Minnesota

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P.O. Box 669
Mankato, MN 56002-0669

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Printed in the United States of America.



This book was manufactured with paper containing at least 10 percent post-consumer waste.

Managing Editor: Catherine Neitge
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Compass Point Books would like to acknowledge the contributions of Tish Farrell, who authored earlier Write Your Own books and whose supporting text is reused in part herein.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rosinsky, Natalie M. (Natalie Myra)

Write your own fable / by Natalie M. Rosinsky.

p. cm. — (Write Your Own)

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-7565-4128-6 (library binding)

1. Authorship—Juvenile literature. 2. Fables—Juvenile literature. I. Title.

PN3377.5.F313R67 2009

808'.06—dc22

2008037635

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or e-mail your request to custserv@compasspointbooks.com



About the Author

Natalie M. Rosinsky is the award-winning author of more than 100 works for young readers. She earned graduate degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has been a high school teacher and college professor as well as a corporate trainer. Natalie, who reads and writes in Mankato, Minnesota, says, "My love of reading led me to write. I take pleasure in framing ideas, crafting words, detailing other lives and places. I am delighted to share these joys with young authors in the Write Your Own series of books."

Be Fabulous

Long before stories were written down, storytellers told short tales—called fables—to teach moral lessons. The fables often used animals and objects to entertain and instruct listeners. In ancient Greece, a man named Aesop became famous for his wise fables. In India and China, fables were one way the Hindu and Buddhist religions spread their ideas of good and bad behavior. Adults as well as children appreciate how fables often poke fun at foolish deeds. Today some fable writers continue these teaching traditions while others create silly fables to entertain readers.

You, too, can write your own fable! This book contains brainstorming and training activities that will help you sharpen your writing skills. Tips and advice from famous writers and examples from their work will help you create fabulous tales. Your wonderful imagination will guide you as you explore the worldwide tradition of fables.

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK



WANT TO BE A WRITER?

This book is the perfect place to start. It aims to give you the tools to write your own fables. Learn how to craft believable portraits of people and beasts, and construct perfect plots with satisfying beginnings, middles, and endings. Examples from famous books appear throughout, with tips and techniques from published authors to help you on your way.

Get the writing habit

Do timed and regular practice. Real writers learn to write even when they don't particularly feel like it.

Create a fable writing zone.

Keep a journal.

Carry a notebook—record interesting events and note how people behave and speak.

Generate ideas

Find a fable that you want to tell or retell. Who are its characters, and what are their problems?

Brainstorm to find out everything about your chosen fable.

Research settings, events, beasts, and people related to the fable.

GETTING STARTED

SETTING THE SCENE

CHARACTERS

VIEWPOINT

SYNOPSIS

You can follow your progress by using the bar on the bottom of each page. The orange color tells you how far along the

fable writing process you have gotten. As the blocks are filled out, your fable will be growing.



Plan

What is your fable about?

What happens?
Plan beginning, middle, and end.

Write a synopsis of your fable.

Write

Write the first draft, then put it aside for a while.

Check spelling and dialogue—does it flow?

Remove unnecessary words.

Does the fable have a good title and a satisfying ending?

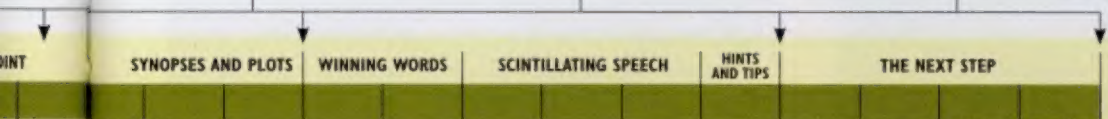
Is the fable's moral stated clearly?

Publish

Write or print the final draft.

Always keep a copy for yourself.

Send your fable to children's magazines, Internet writing sites, competitions, or school magazines that publish fables.



When you get to the end of the bar, your fable is ready to go! You are an author! You now need to decide what to do with your

fable and what your next project should be. Perhaps it will be another fable, or something completely different.

CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED

YOUR CREATIVE LIFESTYLE

What fables have already been told about fast hares and slow tortoises, greedy people and golden geese, or loud lions and timid mice? Are there more stories about wolves, shepherd boys, and sheep? What fables have been written about cats or dogs? Find out by doing research in the library or on the Internet.



When you sit down to write your fable, just like any writer you will need handy tools and a safe, comfortable place for your work. A computer can make writing quicker, but it is not essential. Your imagination can work wonders even with simpler tools.

What you need

These materials will help you organize your ideas and your findings:

- small notebook that you carry everywhere
- paper for writing activities
- pencils or pens with several colors of ink
- index cards for recording facts
- files or folders to keep your gathered information organized and safe
- dictionary, thesaurus, and encyclopedia



Find your writing place

Think about where you as a writer feel most comfortable and creative. Perhaps a spot in your bedroom works best for you. Possibly a corner in the public library is better. If your writing place is outside your home, store your writing materials in a take-along bag or backpack.



Create a fable writing zone

- Play some of your favorite music or music associated with the beasts in fables.
- Use earplugs if you write best when it is quiet.
- Decorate your space with pictures of fable characters or of places associated with fables.
- Place objects that hold good memories from your own life around your space.

Follow the writer's golden rule

Once you have chosen your writing space, go there regularly and often. It is all right to do other kinds of writing there—such as a diary or letters—*as long as you keep on writing!*

CASE STUDY

Michael Morpurgo (right) writes by hand in bed. In the mornings, he props himself up on pillows and writes for three hours.

When her children were little, busy Candace Fleming worked in brief snatches—20 minutes at a time—at her kitchen table. Now she spends five hours a day, Monday through Friday, at her writing desk. She keeps popcorn and sugar-free candy there. Fleming says, "I am a firm believer in good writing needing good snacks."



GET THE WRITING HABIT

Before you can write fantastic fables, you have to build up your writing “muscles.” Just as an athlete lifts weights or a musician practices scales, you must train regularly. You cannot wait until you are in the mood or feel inspired.



Now it's your turn

What a fabulous idea!

Increase your knowledge of traditional fables. Look at collections of Aesop's fables in books or on the Internet. Or try Demi's *Buddha Stories* or David Khderian's *Feathers and Tails: Animal Fables from Around the World*. Look on the Internet for more fables from other continents. Find and read at least five

fables that you have not read before.

In your writing place, use pen and paper to brainstorm about these and other fables. What do they have in common? What do you like most or least about them? You might find the elements for your own fable!

Tips and techniques

Set a regular amount of time and a schedule for your writing. It could be 10 minutes every morning before breakfast or one hour twice a week after supper. Then stick to your schedule.



*Now it's your turn***Expand the world of fables**

Some fable favorites, such as Aesop's "The Goose That Laid the Golden Egg," are told all around the globe. Find and read a version of this story from another culture or part of the world. Demi's Buddhist version of "The Golden Goose" is one example. How is this version different from Aesop's fable? What might *you* use instead of a golden goose in a new version of that tale?

Take 10 minutes to brainstorm. Jot down details about your family's everyday life or your community's traditions that are important to you. How might they fit into a favorite fable? Do not worry about grammar or spelling—just let the ideas flow freely, like water from a stream. You are on your way to being a writer of fables.

**Tips and techniques**

Compare Aesop's "The Scorpion and the Frog" or "The Scorpion and the Ladybug" with the Hindu fable "The Monkey and the Crocodile." All three fables have one creature riding on the back of another. See how a similar plot may have different outcomes and teach different lessons.

AESOP'S FABLES

Short stories that teach a lesson or relate a moral tale have been told for many centuries.

The most famous teller of these tales is Aesop, a legendary figure in ancient Greece. His wise advice supposedly won him his freedom from slavery. By using beasts as characters in his fables, Aesop avoided offending people. They appreciated his wit without feeling directly accused of foolishness themselves. Years after his death, others began to write down versions of Aesop's tales. Famous painters such as Spain's Diego Valazquez imagined how Aesop might have looked (right).

Many of Aesop's fables also appear in Buddhist fables known as Jataka tales and Hindu fables known as the Panchatantra—the Five Books. Perhaps later writers incorrectly gave Aesop credit for these ideas. Some scholars doubt Aesop existed at all!



Aesop's fables always conclude with a brief, witty moral. It sums up the lesson taught by the short story. Some Panchatantra fables and Buddhist Jataka tales also conclude with morals, but sometimes they are omitted. The 550 Jataka fables associated with the life of Buddha have inspired many paintings, statues, and performances. "The Monkey and the Crocodile" is a Panchatantra fable that has been retold many times.



Now it's your turn

Life's lessons

Life offers bitter as well as sweet lessons. We can all change as we learn more. Use your own experiences for the moral of an original fable.

Has someone been unfair or cruel toward you or your friends? Perhaps you watched someone make a foolish choice at a competition, at home, or at school. Perhaps you made this mistake yourself. On the other hand, someone may have been particularly kind, generous, or

loyal at a difficult moment. Perhaps that person was you!

Take 15 minutes in your writing place. Write one sentence of advice based on a "life lesson" you have learned from such good or bad deeds. This can be the moral for your original fable. You may find that you have several pieces of advice to share in a number of fables.

Tips and techniques

Don't remain bitter! Turn bad experiences into good stories. If you recently have felt angry, nervous, or disappointed about something, use that experience or what you learned from it in a fable. This achievement will be sweet.



CASE STUDY

Illustrator and author Jerry Pinkney's parents used Aesop's fables to teach him about wise and foolish behavior. As a child, though, he was more interested in the fables' characters and plots. Only later, Pinkney says, did he realize that these stories and their morals provided "ongoing lessons in my adult life."

FIND YOUR VOICE

Being a good reader is the magic ingredient in becoming a good writer. Reading will help you develop your writer's voice—a style of writing that is all your own.

When you read as a writer, you notice the range and rhythm of various authors' words and sentences. Saviour Pirotta combines short and long sentences for a lively, attention-holding style. Jon Scieszka uses more casual words than Christopher Wormell does. Scieszka's very long, breathless sentences are similar to everyday speech, while Wormell's sentences are more measured and formal. Both Arnold Lobel and Scieszka write funny fables, but Lobel uses one short, simple sentence to finish his joking story with a "straight face." Learning to recognize how writers craft their stories is like learning to identify various types of music. It will take much practice to acquire your own unique voice.

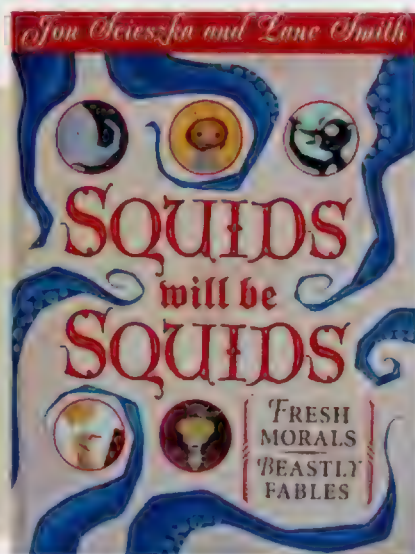


Writers' voices

Look at the words and sentences these writers use. Which writer has characters talking? Was this an effective choice? Which writers combine short and long sentences? Do you think this choice works well? Which kind of writer's voices do you enjoy more—the casual or the formal ones?

This book, Squids Will Be Squids, is a collection of fables that Aesop might have told if he were alive today and sitting in the back of the class daydreaming and goofing around instead of paying attention and correcting his homework like he was supposed to, because his dog ate it and he didn't have time to run out and buy new paper and do it over again before his bus came to pick him up in the morning.

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, *Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables*



At last the Camel said, "Now I am a dancer." She announced a recital and danced before an invited group of camel friends and critics. When her dance was over, she made a deep bow.

There was no applause.

Arnold Lobel, "The Camel Dances," in *Fables*

A Grasshopper was sitting on a blade of grass, chirping and singing and basking in the sun, when a busy Ant passed by, carrying a large piece of grain. "Don't toil away on a fine day such as this," said the Grasshopper. "Stop awhile, sit in the sun, and chat."

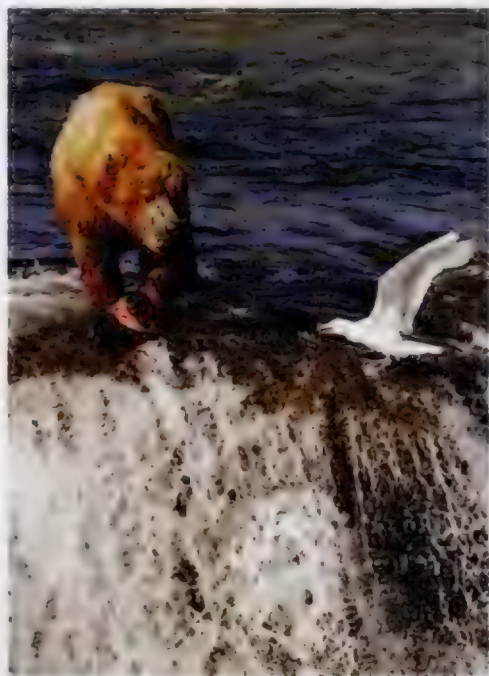
"I am laying up food for the winter," replied the Ant, "and I recommend that you do the same."
Christopher Wormell, "The Ant and the Grasshopper," in *Mice, Morals, and Monkey Business: Lively Lessons From Aesop's Fables*



The hare was hopping furious. He'd been beaten by an old tortoise. Oh, the ridicule! The shame! Animals would be laughing at his defeat all around the countryside. He hopped away before anyone could talk to him and hid in an old burrow behind a prickly bush. No one would find him there.

Saviour Pirotta, "The Tortoise and the Hare," in *Aesop's Fables*

GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT



Often traditional fables involve beasts and are set on farms or other places outdoors. If you lack knowledge of these subjects, use the library or Internet to get your facts straight.

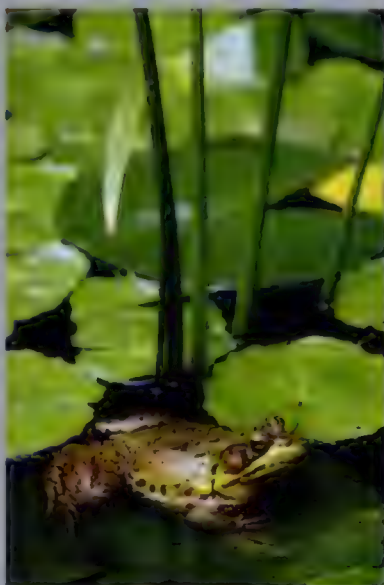
For example, what do sheep eat? Where do rabbits live? What kinds of fish swim in rivers instead of the ocean? A farmer or an expert angler might also be a good resource.

Now it's your turn

Creature features

Do you have a favorite creature? Perhaps you have a dog or cat as a pet. Possibly you like to watch birds as they fly in the sky, frogs as they hop in a pond, or fish as they glide through a stream. Ants or bees might fascinate you. How is your favorite (or least favorite) creature like or unlike people you know?

Spend 10 minutes in your writing place jotting down answers to these questions. For further ideas, find and read at least five fables involving your favorite (or least favorite) creature or ones like it. You might just find an idea for an original fable!



Now it's your turn

Do your research

Research in the library or on the Internet can help you get a better sense of faraway locations or even nearby spots at various times of the year. Look for:

- photographs or videos taken during different seasons
- recordings of wildlife or city sounds

- lists of wildlife that live in a place at various times during the year
- descriptions of locations, wildlife, and changing seasons

Take notes on details that you can use in your own fables.



Tips and techniques

Carry a notebook and pen with you to jot down ideas. You never know when something you see or hear will inspire you!



CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE SCENE

A WORLD OF WONDERS

In your fables, you reveal a world full of wonders to readers.

Beasts and objects that talk will surprise and amuse them.

The setting for your fable may be traditional or modern. Its everyday scenes will seem sharper, brighter, and clearer through the many details you describe. Readers will feel as though they are right there—without ever leaving the “creature comforts” of their own favorite spots. Your imagination and your wonderful attention to detail will also help you create silly places and events that are impossible in the real world.



Tips and techniques

Include famous landmarks—such as the pyramids in Egypt or the Statue of Liberty in New York City—to set your fable in a well-known location.

Now it's your turn

Be sensational!

Many traditional fables have scenes set outdoors—on farms, in forests, or near mountains, caves, ponds, or the ocean. Visit a nearby natural area with your writer's notebook in hand. Look around. Close your eyes and breathe deeply.

Listen carefully. Run your hand through the grass or along a boulder. Now take 10 minutes to jot down all the details your senses revealed.

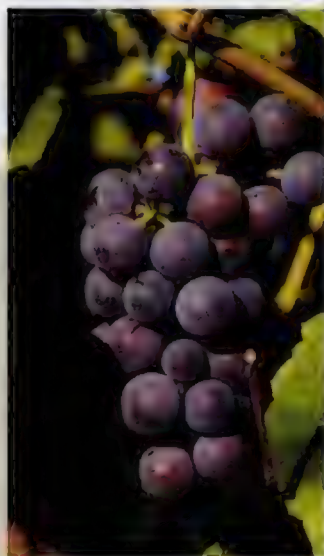
Use these details as you create an outdoors fable for readers.

CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE SCENE

Sensational nature

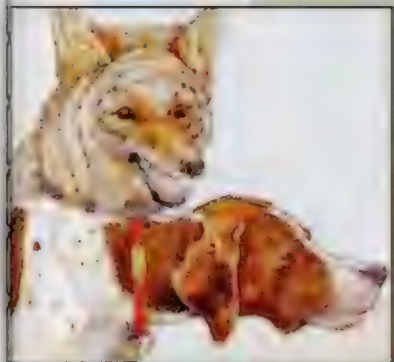
Use as many of the five senses as you can to bring a scene to life. Helen Ward does this in her retelling of Aesop's fable about a hungry fox:

The fox found a long cane and tried to prod the grapes from their vine, but the cane snapped. He threw and kicked sticks and stones at the vine, but the grapes were determined to stay put. Their sweet smell drifted among the branches, wasps and butterflies flew by with casual ease, while on the ground below the fox lay panting and exhausted. Not even a few minutes' patience solved the fox's problem. By the evening the dark fruits hung as resolutely from the vine as they had that morning.
Helen Ward, "Sour Grapes," in *Unwitting Wisdom: An Anthology of Aesop's Fables*



Readers can hear, smell, see, and feel what the fox does. We understand the frustration that leads the fox to declare that the grapes must be sour—supporting Aesop's moral that "it is easy to despise what you cannot obtain."

Similarly, in "The Wolf and the House Dog," Jerry Pinkney uses a vivid detail to show the moment that leads a hungry wolf to decide that "lean freedom is better than fat slavery."



Eagerly the wolf trotted beside the dog. But as they left the shadow of the trees, the wolf saw something near the dog's neck flash in the bright sunlight.

"Pardon me, but what is that around your neck?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing," said the dog. "It's just the ring on my collar where they fasten me to the chain."

"Chain!" cried the wolf in horror, stopping in her tracks.
Jerry Pinkney, "The Wolf and the House Dog," in *Aesop's Fables*

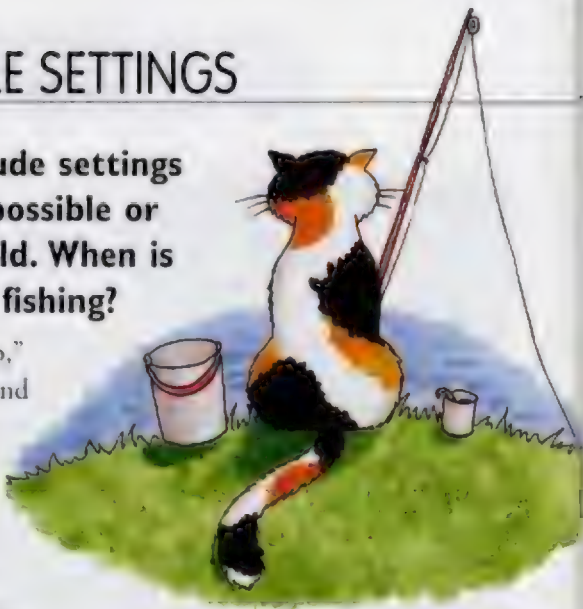
It is the sight of sunlight flashing on the metal ring on the collar that warns the wolf away.

CREATING IMPOSSIBLE SETTINGS

Some fun-filled fables include settings and actions that are impossible or unbelievable in the real world. When is the last time you saw a cat fishing?

In Jon Scieszka's "Elephant & Mosquito," the huge creature and tiny bug pal around town until Elephant sees a clock. He then worries about getting home on time. In Candace Fleming's novel *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*, typical school experiences are exaggerated in humorous ways.

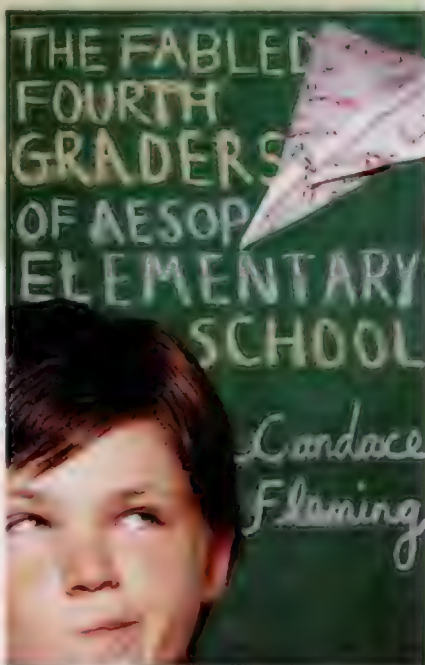
Acting out in the lunchroom, three students, Ashlee A., Ashleigh B., and Ashley Z., "put their mashed potatoes together and built a snowman." When student Missy Place loses her mittens, she looks through the very unusual room decorations brought by her teacher, Mr. Jupiter:



"Oh, no!" gasped Missy. "Not again." Dropping to her knees, she searched everywhere—inside the Polynesian ceremonial slit drums, under the stuffed giant sloth, behind the brass astrolabe, on top of the piranha tank, and even in the shrunken head collection. But it was no use.

Candace Fleming, The Fabulous Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School

This entertainingly unbelievable classroom setting and the amazing Lost and Found "graveyard" that she also searches at the school provide a delightful background as Missy learns that "honesty is the best policy."



Tips and techniques

Put unusual items in everyday places to make them seem magical and funny.

Be surprising!

You may choose to set your fable in an unusual place.

Restaurants, living rooms, and schools are the modern settings for some of Arnold Lobel's fables. His beast characters use napkins, read newspapers, and even throw spitballs! In *Bernelly and Harriet*, Elizabeth Dahlie updates "The Country Mouse and the City Mouse" to modern Boston. Even though this city is never named in her book, its pictures and words such as *State House* and *swan boats* suggest Boston landmarks.



CASE STUDY

Elizabeth Dahlie says that, like her two mice characters, "I make my home in New England." She lives just west of Boston. Bernelly's fly-fishing and Harriet's painting also reflect important parts of author and illustrator Dahlie's life. Her father is the director of a fly-fishing center and museum.

Now it's your turn

Clown around!

Do you enjoy jokes? Do you like to be silly? Writing a fractured, funny fable might be right up your clown alley!

For inspiration, read at least five fables from such funny collections as *Ackamarackus: Julius Lester's Sumptuously Silly Fantastically Funny Fables*, Jon Scieszka's and Lane Smith's *Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables*, Arnold Lobel's *Fables*, or Paul Rosenthal's

Yo, Aesop! Get a Load of These Fables. See what silly sense they make of traditional tales as they retell and sometimes combine them. Note how these authors update fables in strange and funny ways and play with ideas in their own, brand-new fables. As you laugh, you may discover a storytelling method you want to use or think of your own original rib-tickler.

CHAPTER 3: CHARACTERS

DISCOVER YOUR HERO

Choose your hero! Traditional fables usually spotlight beasts, but some also center on people. Usually those tales also include beast characters.

"Androcles and the Lion," "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," and "The Miller, His Son, and the Donkey" are three of Aesop's fables with human heroes. Your hero may have virtues, but often this figure has a major flaw. Learning a lesson that points out or corrects this flaw becomes the hero's adventure. You may even decide to focus on a character whose tricky ways would typically make him or her the villain. In some silly fables, the hero is a manufactured or natural object rather than a living creature. Whatever your choice of hero, your job is to make the reader interested in this character and the character's problems.



CASE STUDY

In some traditional fables, parts of nature are the heroes. The sun, moon, trees, and rivers are main characters in several Aesop stories. Lightning is a character in one Panchatantra tale.



Show your hero's problems

Perhaps your hero is in danger. In Aesop's "The Lion and the Mouse," a strong lion is trapped by a hunter's net. The tiny mouse that the lion once spared rescues him by gnawing through the net. Jerry Pinkney sums up the famous lesson the lion learns: "Even the strongest can sometimes use the help of the weakest." In her retelling of this fable, Helen Ward adds another layer to the tale. She concludes:



The lion tried to look as humble as he felt, thanking the mouse profusely and promising never to underestimate the smaller creatures again. The mouse in turn tried to look heroic and brave and as unlike a tasty snack as he could. It was with some relief and not a little pride that he watched as the lion disappeared into the shadows of the forest.
Helen Ward, "Size Isn't Everything," in *Unwitting Wisdom: An Anthology of Aesop's Fables*

Even with the lion's promise, the heroic mouse cannot help fearing being just a tasty snack to the lion. It is a mouse's nature to be afraid of such creatures.

In other fables with beasts, these characters also display their natural qualities. Ants are busy, tortoises are slow, and rabbits are fast and easily spooked. In Jataka tales, the rabbit is easily frightened. In some of these fables, a falling coconut convinces her that the earth is breaking up. In others, a falling mango or apple makes her—like Chicken Little—think that the sky is falling.



Tips and techniques

Be sure your beast characters act in ways that are natural to them.

FIND A GOOD NAME

The right name for your hero will work its own magic.

Candace Fleming clues readers in and makes us laugh with the names of students and staff at Aesop Elementary School. Humphrey Parrot repeats himself, Leonard Wittier cracks jokes, and Victoria Sovaine constantly admires her appearance. Of course librarian Miss Paige Turner loves books. These funny, appropriate names let us know right away that out-of-the-ordinary events will take place in Fleming's book. They are beyond what we would expect in everyday life.

Some fractured fables by Jon Scieszka (right) feature such unusual heroes as Rock, Paper, and Scissors, Piece of Toast, and Froot Loops. Their adventures have humorously obvious morals such as "breakfast is the most important meal of the day." Scieszka wisely chose *not* to give a further name to these heroic characters. A talking Froot Loop is silly all by itself! Adding a cute name like Freddy or Frances is not necessary.



Tips and techniques

In fractured fables, follow Jon Scieszka's lead and do not name characters that are objects. They are already silly.

Give your hero weaknesses

No one is perfect. One way to encourage readers to care about your hero is to show this character's flaws. In Aesop's "The Grasshopper and the Ants," fun-loving Grasshopper does not think ahead. He goes hungry as a result. Candace Fleming retells this tale using fourth-graders, who are embarrassed because they did not prepare for a school play. They learn "it is wise to prepare today for the wants of tomorrow." In Jon Scieszka's silly fable "Frog's New Shoes," Frog wastes money because he foolishly believes a "great commercial for new skateboard shoes." The lesson of the story? "Everyone knows frogs can't skateboard, but it's kind of sad that they believe everything they see on TV."



Now it's your turn

"Magic" your hero into being

Use your imagination to brainstorm your hero into being. Draw five lines down a sheet of paper. Write one of these words at the top of each column: appearance, likes, dislikes, weaknesses, strengths, and—for beasts—natural behavior. Now take 10 to 15 minutes to think up five items for each category.

You now know as many as 30 things about your hero. You may use all or only some of this information in your tale. Perhaps these ideas will lead you to still others.



CREATE YOUR VILLAIN

Avillain typically causes the problem or conflict facing the hero.

Some traditional fables show such villains being punished by their own trickery. In other fables, however, the villain may also become a hero. Once this character is shown what is wrong about his or her behavior, the character corrects it. The former villain has learned the fable's lesson.

Sometimes a question remains about a character's actions. Is a creature that survives by eating others an evil villain—or is this beast merely acting naturally? Which kind of villain will you create?

Here's an example of a beast acting according to its nature. A hungry wolf sees some sheep and makes a plan:

Clothed in the sheepskin, the Wolf easily deceived the shepherd and his dogs and was soon among the flock ... and hungry no more.

Christopher Wormell, "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," *Mice, Morals, and Monkey Business: Lively Lessons From Aesop's Fables*



In another fable, a beast is punished with its own trickery. Fox had selfishly served Stork food on shallow plates that Stork could not use. Stork plays the same trick on Fox:

But what did you know—the stork had made a stew, but she'd served it in tall, narrow beakers!

"Dig in before it gets cold," she said, pretending not to notice the angry look in the fox's eyes. "I've made lots. Enough for second helpings."

Poor Fox. He tried to stick his snout down the beaker, he tried to reach past the narrow neck with his tongue, he even tried to suck the food up. No matter what he did, that delicious food remained firmly out of reach.
Saviour Pirota, "The Fox and the Stork," in *Aesop's Fables*

In a third fable, a boy learns the error of his ways. The bored shepherd boy has often cried “Wolf!” to stir up excitement. Then a real wolf appears, but the boy learns that “no one believes a liar.”

But just as the sheep started to graze, he saw a dark shape with glowing eyes lurking in the shadow of the trees. “Wolf!” he shouted as loudly as he could. The animal growled and crept closer. “Wolf! Wolf!” cried the frightened boy, but no one came. And the wolf leaped on one of the sheep, dragging it away into the forest. Jerry Pinkney, “The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf,” in *Aesop’s Fables*



Now it's your turn

The picture of evil

What does your villain look like? Get ideas by looking through old photographs, magazines, and books. When you find a face or creature that interests you, take five or 10 minutes to write a description of it. Repeat this process. Now reread your descriptions.

Is your villain's appearance captured in one description? Perhaps you need to combine descriptions to create your villainous portrait.



WHAT IS THE MOTIVE?

In fables, beasts and people commit evil or foolish deeds for various reasons.

They may be motivated by greed, revenge, vanity, or something else. Show your villain's motives to capture and keep the attention of readers.

In one Jataka tale, a man wants to win the large bet he has placed on a race. His greed leads him to be cruel to his beloved bull Beauty for the first time:

As the race began, he jumped on Beauty's back and fiercely whipped his sides. Then he shouted, "Pull, you demon! Pull!" But Beauty had never heard such words or felt his master's whip before. The bull would not budge an inch. His master lost the contest and went home in defeat.
Demi, "The Black Bull," in *Buddha Stories*



Later Beauty reminds the man that he has never hurt him or his children and there was no reason to "forget all respect for your friend and servant." His master changes his bad behavior. During the next race, he praises and gently strokes Beauty. The pair win, illustrating the advice "treat others with kindness and your deeds will be rewarded."

CASE STUDY

Saviour Pirotta was born on the Mediterranean island of Malta. He grew up listening to stories told by people in his village. Legends about the many pirates who visited Malta were his favorites.



Develop a supporting cast

You can tell readers much about your hero and villain by showing how they act with other characters. Perhaps the villain first reveals his or her true nature this way. Work your storytelling magic by developing a supporting cast of characters.

One version of the fabled race between Tortoise and Hare tells just how much the show-off, boasting Hare irritates the other creatures. Their views prepare us for Hare's foolish behavior during the race that follows:

The general population, on the other hand, liked nothing better than discussing the small size of the hare's brain, and where he kept it while he was hurtling about, and how long it would take a crocodile to eat him if he accidentally ran into the river, and whether or not anyone would try to rescue him. Most admitted to a profound respect for the crocodile's teeth but none for any part of the hare.

Helen Ward, "Steady and Slow," in *Unwitting Wisdom: An Anthology of Aesop's Fables*

Tips and techniques

Make supporting characters memorable through what they say as well as how they look or act.



Another version of this race shows how the bragging of other beasts leads Hare into trouble:

They had stopped to drink at a pond. They were all talking about the things that they could do well.

"I can hold my breath underwater," said a duck.

"I can fly a long way without stopping," claimed a swallow.

"I can caw very loudly," stated a crow.

"I can see in the dark," boasted a fox.

"I can run very fast," the hare joined in. "Faster than anyone here." He was carried away by his own bragging. He looked around the pond, grinning foolishly at all the animals.

"I challenge any one of you to a race." Saviour Pirotta, "The Tortoise and the Hare," in *Aesop's Fables*

The creatures' dialogue about their natural abilities makes these supporting characters come to life for readers.



CHAPTER 4: VIEWPOINT



CHOOSE A POINT OF VIEW

Before you write the first fantastic line of your fable, you must decide who is telling its story.

Do you want readers to know all about the characters—what everyone is thinking, feeling, and doing? Or do you want to follow

the thoughts and experiences of just one character—such as your hero? Perhaps you have decided to retell a tale from the viewpoint of another character inside or outside the fable. These decisions determine your fable's point of view.

Omniscient viewpoint

Traditional fables are often told from the all-seeing and all-knowing—the omniscient—point of view. The storyteller or narrator describes what all the characters think and feel and also shares knowledge of events beyond the characters' knowledge. Such tales often begin with the words "Once upon a time," "Every day," or "It was."

That is how Michael Morpurgo begins his retelling of "The Crow and the Jug":

It was bone-dry in the countryside. There had been no rain for weeks on end now. For all the animals and birds it had been a terrible time. To find even a drop of water to drink was almost impossible for them.

But the crow, being the cleverest of birds, always managed to find just enough water to keep himself alive.

Michael Morpurgo, "The Crow and the Jug," in *The McElderry Book of Aesop's Fables*



First-person viewpoint

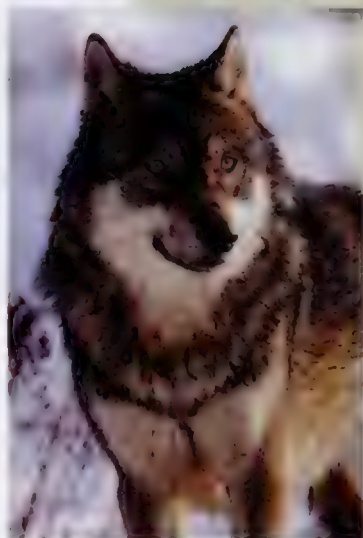
The first-person viewpoint uses a character inside or outside the tale to narrate the story. This narrator uses words such as “I said” or “I thought” or “I did.” Saviour Pirotta (right) creatively combines first-person viewpoint with the omniscient viewpoint in his version of Aesop’s fables. In Pirotta’s book, each of the fables is introduced by a narrator outside the tale—Aesop himself! Pirotta writes these introductions using a first-person viewpoint for his imagined Aesop. In one, he connects his own slavery with a fable about a pet dog:



It's time for another story, my friends! And once again, it comes from my experiences in life. Many people have asked me if I was happy when I was a slave. My answer is always the same. I always yearned to be free, even though my master was kind and did not beat me or send me to bed hungry.

*... [One] day I saw a fat dog trotting along with his master. His coat was shiny, the sign of a well-fed animal. He was clean—he had probably been scrubbed and perfumed by the master's slaves that very morning. Yet there was something sad about him as he watched some stray dogs running free around him. His eyes were full of longing. That evening I made up this story about *The Wolf and the Dog*.*

Saviour Pirotta, “The Wolf and the Dog,” in *Aesop's Fables*



The fable that follows Aesop’s first-person introduction is told in the omniscient viewpoint, giving more information than any of the characters inside the fable has. Its first sentence is “The wild places of Greece are full of wolves.”

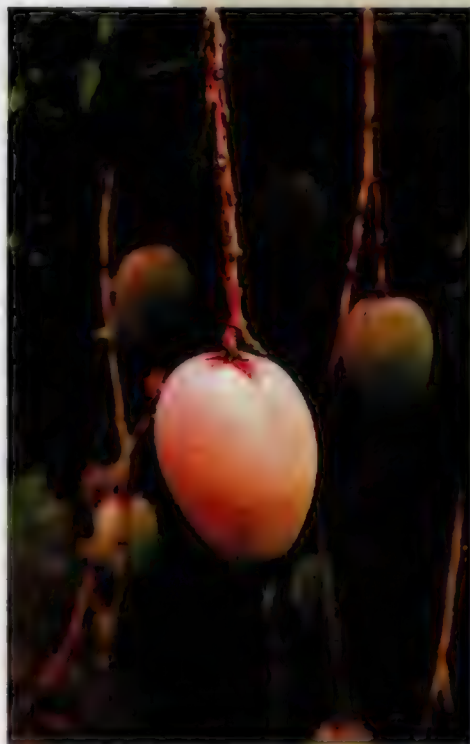
THIRD-PERSON VIEWPOINT

With the third-person viewpoint, the writer stays inside one character's mind but uses such words as "he said" or "she thought" to describe events.

The narrator can tell what other characters think or feel only through dialogue. Sometimes the narrator misunderstands events! Third-person viewpoint is often written in the past tense.



Although Jan Thornhill begins and ends *The Rumor: A Jataka Tale from India* with the omniscient viewpoint, much of this fable is told through the third-person viewpoint of Hare:



Just then, a ripe mango broke free from a branch and crashed down on a crunchy old palm frond behind the hare. It made such a loud sound she thought it was an explosion.

"OH, NO!" she cried. "The world is breaking up!"

Leaping to her feet, she ran through the palm and mango grove as fast as her hippity-hop legs could carry her. She was so frightened she didn't look back to see what had made the noise, not even once. She just ran.

*Jan Thornhill, *The Rumor: A Jataka Tale from India**

Hare's limited third-person viewpoint shows readers how she misunderstands and later spreads the rumor about what has happened.

Illustrator-author Mitsumasa Anno also creatively combines a limited viewpoint with an omniscient one. In *Anno's Aesop: A Book of Fables by Aesop and Mr. Fox*, Anno splits each page in half. In the top half, he draws and writes a traditional fable. On the bottom half, the narrator, Mr. Fox, describes what he thinks is happening in the picture to his cub Freddy. Mr. Fox is usually wrong. At several points, Mr. Fox even thinks the fables are about an arithmetic problem! Readers can delight in all the wrong conclusions this narrator reaches.

CASE STUDY

Japanese illustrator-author Mitsumasa Anno travels around the world, often stopping in countries where he does not speak the language. Anno admits, "I am really a lot like Freddy's father, Mr. Fox!" He says, "I might pretend that I could really read the language" to keep a little boy's "respect for me."



Now it's your turn

Magically switch viewpoints!

Use the magic wand of your imagination to write part of your fable from different viewpoints. First try the omniscient viewpoint. Then write this scene again from the first-person or third-person viewpoint of the hero or villain. Magically switch viewpoints again to rewrite this scene

from the sidelines, using the viewpoint of a nearby person or beast. This narrator could be part of the tale or just an outside observer. Decide whether this character will understand or misunderstand events. Reread your scenes. Which version do you like best? Allow half an hour for this activity.

CHAPTER 5: SYNOPSSES AND PLOTS

YOUR STORY'S STORY

As your fable takes shape like a nest being feathered by busy birds, it is a good idea to describe it in a paragraph or two. This is called a synopsis.

If someone asked, "What is this fable about?" these paragraphs would be the answer. An editor often wants to see a synopsis of a story before accepting it for publication.

Study back cover blurbs

Studying the information on the back cover of a book—called the blurb—will help you write an effective synopsis. A good blurb contains a brief summary of a book's content. Sometimes reviews by famous people make up part or all of this summary. A blurb also gives the tone of the book—is it serious or funny? Most important of all, the blurb makes readers want to open the book and read it cover-to-cover! That is certainly true of the text (right) on the back cover of Candace Fleming's *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*. It cleverly consists of imaginary reviews.



What Critics Are Saying About
*The Fabled Fourth Graders
Of Aesop Elementary School*

"A delightful romp ...
if you like romping through poison ivy."
School Lunchroom Journal

"Paige Turner? What a ridiculous name!"
Mimi Overdieu, Youth Services Librarian

"All the king's horses and all the king's
men couldn't control these kids!"
*Dr. H. Dumpty,
Mother Goose School for Wayward Youth*

"Where's OUR elementary school?"
The Brothers Grimm

"This is NOT what I had in mind!"
Aesop

Now it's your turn

Storyboards rule!

Write a blurb for the fable you plan to write. Summarizing it in one or two paragraphs will sharpen your ideas. Use the blurb to identify the most important events in the fable. You are now ready to sketch the "scenes" for the tale's story. This is what filmmakers do when they plan the

sequence of events in a movie. Under each sketched scene, jot down brief notes about what you will mention about this event. Use this series of sketches, which filmmakers call a storyboard, as a helpful outline as you write the fable.

How about a book of fables?

When you brainstorm ideas for a fable, you may come up with several that interest you. Make the most of your imagination! Fables are short. You may decide to write and put together several for your own book. Candace Fleming bases her fables in one setting, Aesop Elementary School, and uses students and staff members there as characters. You might use one cast of characters and setting for your collection, but you do not have to. The sky's the limit as creatures far and wide figure in your fables.

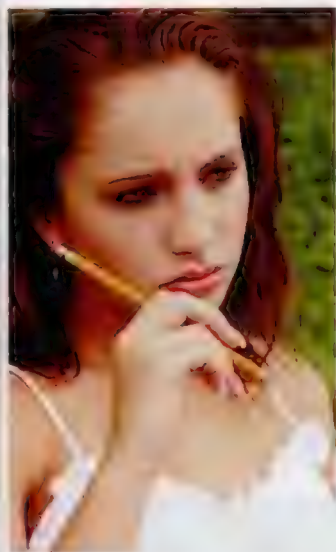
Remember that in a collection of fables, each fable has its own heroes and villains. It also has its own beginning, middle, and end. Sometimes these fables may be told from different points of view.



CASE STUDY

Michael Morpurgo adapted six Aesop's fables into a successful stage play.

BAIT THE HOOK



You have planned your plot, and you are ready to fascinate readers with your fable. Which kind of tempting opening will you use?

Appealing openings

You may start a collection of tales with an introduction that explains what is to come. Michael Morpurgo describes his retold tales in a first chapter politely titled "For Mr. Aesop from Mr. Morpurgo, a Thank You." Demi opens *Buddha Stories* with an author's note giving information about Jataka tales. Saviour Pirotta begins his collection with a story and warm greeting from its fictional narrator, Aesop himself:

Welcome, friends and strangers—make yourselves comfortable! If you are looking for entertainment, then you have come to the right place. My name is Aesop—some of you might have heard of me. I am a storyteller. Some say that I am the greatest storyteller ever, but I don't know about that.

Saviour Pirotta, "The Cat's Bell," in *Aesop's Fables*

Even if your book has an overall introduction, the opening sentences of each fable are important. They are the hook that will lure readers into your fabulous world of speaking beasts and other characters.

Good beginnings

Here are some attention-grabbing sentences that work like a charm:

A ridiculous, funny opening:

A chicken and a cow visited the park one summer day. They didn't know it, though. The chicken had been cut up, dipped in batter, and fried. The cow was now a salami. They were part of a picnic lunch, sitting on paper plates among pickles, crackers, and coleslaw.

Paul Rosenthal, "Feathers, Frisbees, & Flying Salami," in *Yo, Aesop! Get a Load of These Fables*

CHAPTER 5: SYNOPSSES AND PLOTS

A beginning that sets the fable in modern times:

One bright and sunny day, Grasshopper came home from school, dropped his backpack, and was just about to run outside to meet his friends.

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, "Grasshopper Logic," in *Squids Will Be Squids: Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables*

A dramatic opening that plunges right into the main problem:

A Wolf was feasting on an animal he had just killed when a bone stuck in his throat. This caused him such pain that he began to groan with agony, and beg everyone he met for help.

Christopher Wormell, "The Wolf and the Crane," in *Mice, Morals, and Monkey Business: Lively Lessons from Aesop's Fables*



A mysteriously urgent beginning:

Something had to be done. The farm cat, with his sharp eyes and his sharp claws, had killed off so many mice that those who were left held a crisis meeting to see what, if anything, could be done to stop him.

Michael Morpurgo, "Belling the Cat," in *The McElderry Book of Aesop's Fables*



Tips and techniques

Try out various openings for your tale. As one fable reminds us, "practice makes perfect."

BUILD THE SUSPENSE

After your wonderful opening, you must not let the magic fade! Keep and build suspense for readers by showing the hero's adventures and hinting at others to come.



A number of adventures

Long ago many people believed the number three had magical significance. Some fables as well as fairy tales have heroes face three dangers or obstacles to overcome.

In Michael Morpurgo's "The Miller, His Son, and the Donkey," the foolish Miller listens to three pieces of bad advice. The last, most ridiculous idea has the two men carrying the donkey! When the struggling animal runs away, the characters learn that "if you try to please everyone, you end up pleasing no one."

Silly fables may also show three adventures, or—in Jon Scieszka's tales—lack of adventures. In his fable "Deer, Mouse, Rabbit, and Squid," Squid's grumbling increases at each suggested activity. By the third time, Squid replies, "That's so boring. I'm just going to go home." Use this fable tradition and plot three events or decisions for your hero.

Tips and techniques

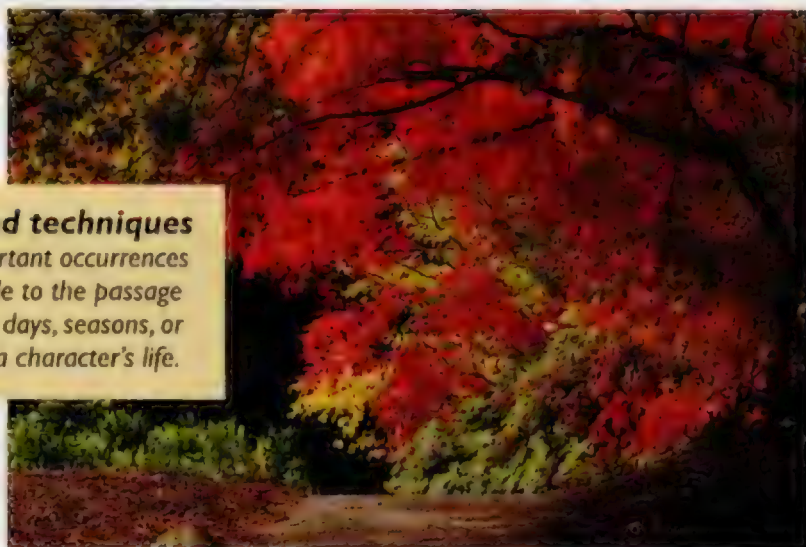
Start small and build up to the most challenging or silly adventure for your hero. This will keep readers from feeling let down.

Time marches on

Showing the passage of time is another way to keep readers involved with your hero's adventures. Saviour Pirotta introduces and organizes his fables according to supposed events in narrator Aesop's life. We want to find out what happens next to Pirotta's friendly, modest Aesop. In Pirotta's version of "The Lion and the Mouse," sunset and sunrise are times of danger for both Mouse and Lion. Readers come to expect another adventure each time daylight fades or returns.

Hint at danger

You can also add suspense by hinting about what is to come. This writing technique—called foreshadowing—will have readers eagerly waiting to find out what happens next. In Pirotta's "The Lion and the Mouse," the lion's danger is foreshadowed when the mouse says to him, "But my skills might come in handy for you one day." Unlike the lion, we know better than to laugh at this telling remark.



Tips and techniques

Link important occurrences in the fable to the passage of time in days, seasons, or events in a character's life.

END WITH A BANG

Stories build up suspense until they reach a climax. After this dramatic point, the characters' main problems are resolved. In a fable, the heroes or villains have learned something—although what they learn may not make them happy!

The climax

A fable's climax may be very dramatic. In Jerry Pinkney's retelling of "Androcles and the Lion," the escaped slave Androcles is recaptured and punished by being tossed to a hungry lion:

Androcles shut his eyes in dread, expecting to be torn limb from limb. But no tooth or claw touched him. When Androcles opened his eyes in amazement, he saw his own lion crouched happily at his feet. Androcles laughed with joy as he knelt to embrace his friend.
Jerry Pinkney, "Androcles and the Lion," in *Aesop's Fables*

The hungry beast remembers that Androcles had once removed a thorn from his paw. The lion surprises the watching soldiers when it spares Androcles, demonstrating that "gratitude is not limited to humankind." This unexpected display impresses the emperor so much that he frees both Androcles and the lion.



Now it's your turn

Choose your own ending

Reread one of your favorite fables and think about its ending. Could it have ended in other ways? Write one of these new endings. Put it aside. Now go back and read both versions of the tale. Which

one do you prefer—and why? Could your own fable have more than one ending? Take 10 minutes to brainstorm two possible endings for your tale.

Conclude your adventure

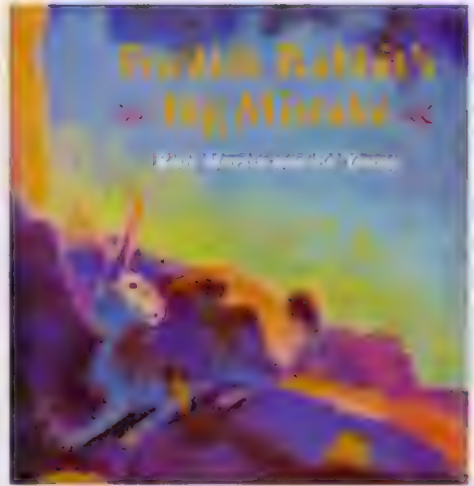
Have your hero finish his or her adventure or journey. In Rafe Martin and Ed Young's *Foolish Rabbit's Big Mistake*, Rabbit learns that Earth is not really breaking up. She discovers the real cause of the noise that frightened her.

In Demi's "The Turtle and the Geese," Turtle gets his wish to fly. Two geese soar into the sky holding a stick that Turtle grips with his mouth. When Turtle opens his mouth to scold some teasing children, though, he falls to his death. This is a terrible way to learn that "disaster can come from opening your mouth at the wrong time."

A good ending can refer back in some way to the beginning of the story. This reminds readers of how much has or has not changed since the tale started. At the end of *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School*, librarian Miss Paige Turner has changed dramatically. She dresses differently and even lets Mr. Jupiter borrow some books without checking them out.

Avoid being predictable

Surprise your readers. You might choose to tickle readers' funny bones by combining two or more fables into one fractured fable. This is what Paul Rosenthal does in "Feathers, Frisbees, & Flying Salami." This silly fable is a combination of Aesop's "The Tortoise and the Hare" and "The Tortoise and the Eagle." Rosenthal's busy ant reminds a



pigeon that "little by little does the trick," but the hurrying bird does not listen. Instead, he drops the food he collects when he opens his beak to boast!

Bad endings

To create a fable that leaves readers feeling fantastic, avoid a bad ending. Bad endings are ones that:

- fail to show how the characters have changed in some way
- lack a clear moral at the end of the tale, if you have chosen this typical way to end fables

After all

After concluding *The Rumor: A Jataka Tale from India*, illustrator and author Jan Thornhill adds another page filled with facts about each creature in the fable. Helen Ward also ends "The Hare and the Tortoise" with several pages of creature facts. You might want to try this technique.

CHAPTER 6: WINNING WORDS

MAKE YOUR WORDS WORK

Your well-chosen words will work magic. They will transport readers to fabulous worlds where talking beasts seem as real as next-door neighbors.

Every word counts. Just as you would not waste sweet water in a desert, choose your words wisely. Only the most vivid and powerful words are worthy of your fable.

Use vivid imagery

Use your imagination to create vivid word pictures. In “The Lion and the Mouse,” Saviour Pirotta uses metaphors to describe how the mouse feels after she scrambles onto “a mountain all covered in dry, golden-yellow grass”:

All at once there was an earthquake; the mountain shook violently. The mouse tried to hold onto the golden-yellow grass, but she was thrown off—only to be caught in a viselike grip that threatened to crush her bones. Razor-sharp claws wrapped themselves around her, pressing into her fur, and a loud roar made her ears ring.

Saviour Pirotta, “The Lion and the Mouse,” in *Aesop’s Fables*

As the mouse discovers, she is not really on a mountain but atop the lion! This word picture does not mean that the lion magically became a mountain. A real earthquake did not take place. Instead, this word picture communicates how tiny the mouse is compared with the annoyed lion. She mistakes him for a huge landmass because he is too big for her to see all at once.



In “The Cat’s Bell,” Pirotta uses a simile to describe the easy life some farm mice enjoy, until a terrible event occurs:

Pearly-gray mice set up their homes in the grain supply, nibbling through the sacks with their pointy teeth. There were mice in the dairy, mice in the pantry, mice in the manger—and even mice in the pillows. Oh, those mice! They lived like lords and ladies, until one morning the farmer found mice droppings in his breakfast honey. Then he upped and bought himself a cat!
Saviour Pirotta, “The Cat’s Bell,” in *Aesop’s Fables*

This word picture comparing the mice to noble lords and ladies helps readers understand what an easy life the mice had before the cat arrived.

Tips and techniques

A metaphor describes something by calling it something else—for instance, a very active person is a “tornado.” A simile describes something by comparing it to something with the word “like” or “as.” For example, a dewdrop sparkles like a diamond.

Now it’s your turn

Imagine that!

By yourself or with a friend, brainstorm some similes for colors and textures. Make a list of 10 colors and textures. For each word, write down five similes. For instance, “As blue (or gray or green) as a ...” or try “As smooth (or sharp or rough) as the ...” How could you use these images or ones like them in your fable? Use a dictionary or thesaurus for extra help.



WRITE TO EXCITE

When you write action scenes, excite your readers with your word choice. Replace everyday action words with bold, unusual ones. Have characters dart instead of run and leapfrog instead of jump.

Helen Ward uses vivid action words, along with metaphors and a simile, to describe a scene that makes foolish Tortoise wish he could fly:

Swallows scooted low across the grassland, rich blue darts of squealing, aggravating speed, each flit and turn filling the tortoise with envy. Butterflies flapped like damp handkerchiefs in the shimmering heat of the afternoon. Even the earthbound ants grew wings and flew. IT WAS UNFAIR.

Dragonflies rattled and reversed over pools. Damselflies, bright turquoise hyphens, hovered among the bulrushes.

Helen Ward, "Not Flying, but Falling," in *Unwitting Wisdom: An Anthology of Aesop's Fables*

Instead of *flew*, Ward uses the more exciting words *scooted*, *flapped*, *rattled*, *reversed*, and *hovered*.

Play with words

Do you like to joke around? Silly fables are a great place to play with words.

Fun with puns is entirely possible! For instance, Paul Rosenthal laughs along with readers in his book *Yo, Aesop! Get a Load of These Fables!* His fable about sea creatures is humorously titled "Clam Up!" He plays with two meanings for the words "jelly" and "jam" when he writes, "The jellyfish's tentacles stung each other, leaving the poor jelly in a jam."

This "jam" is trouble-flavored rather than strawberry or peach.



Use dramatic irony

When your readers know something the characters do not, enjoyable suspense increases. This is called dramatic irony, and authors strengthen it by choosing words wisely. At the end of Mitsumasa Anno's book of fables, his narrator Mr. Fox describes two pictured characters to his son Freddy. Mr. Fox's remarks reveal that he still does not know how mistaken he is about the fables displayed on the top half of the pages. In fact, his narration has nothing to do with the fables at all!

The old man also likes to read to her. But his eyes are getting weak and he can't see very well, so he sometimes makes up a story or two. Emily is so good and polite that she always listens quietly and never complains. She's a lot like you, Freddy. You listen to my stories without complaining or correcting me. But then, it's not the same—Daddy doesn't make up stories, does he?
Mitsumasa Anno, *Anno's Aesop: A Book of Fables* by Aesop and Mr. Fox

Using dramatic irony is another way to win your readers' attention with words.

Tips and techniques

Make silly fables more playful by using puns.

Now it's your turn

Play with your words!

By yourself or with a friend, make a list of 10 everyday action words such as *walk* and *fall*. Then have fun brainstorming at least four unusual substitutes for each

word. Perhaps an angry beast could glare instead of look. Use a dictionary or a thesaurus for extra help.



CHAPTER 7: SCINTILLATING SPEECH

USE DRAMATIC DIALOGUE

Conversations can help readers understand various personalities and the relationships between characters.

Dialogue also gives readers' eyes a rest as it breaks up the page of narrative. Done well, dialogue is a powerful storytelling tool—one that adds suspense, color, and mood even as it moves the plot forward.



Let your characters speak for themselves

Early in Helen Ward's "Steady and Slow," Hare boasts, "I am the master of faster." With these words, Hare reveals how irritating he is. He also demonstrates the pride that will be his downfall. In Demi's "The Cunning Wolf," Wolf makes a holy promise not

to eat. His own words reveal that this vow is not one Wolf can keep. In the middle of the fable, a young goat jumps about near Wolf. "Forget about starving today—I'll starve tomorrow!" Wolf says. He learns the Buddhist lesson that "it is easier to make a promise than to keep it."

CASE STUDY

Author and illustrator Arnold Lobel originally set out to retell Aesop's *fables*. However, he soon found out that these tales were too serious for him. That is when he began to write his own funny *Fables*.

Tips and techniques

Usually use *says*, *said*, or *wrote* to introduce quotations. Sometimes substitute words such as *complained*, *whispered*, or *shouted* for variety and when they suit the situation.

FABLES



ARNOLD LOBEL

Arnold Lobel uses dialogue to explain the actions of a small kangaroo who behaves badly in school:

The principal went to visit Mr. and Mrs. Kangaroo. He sat down in a living-room chair.

"Ouch!" cried the principal. "There is a thumbtack in this chair!"

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Kangaroo. "I enjoy putting thumbtacks in chairs."

A spitball hit the principal on his nose.

"Forgive me," said Mrs. Kangaroo, "but I can never resist throwing those things."

Arnold Lobel, "The Bad Kangaroo," in *Fables*

As the principal learns to his dismay, and Lobel points out in this funny fable's moral, "a child's conduct will reflect the ways of his parents."

Now it's your turn

Listen in

Tune into the way people talk. Turn on the radio or TV for 10 minutes, and copy down bits of conversation. Or jot down what you overhear in school hallways or in a store. You will begin to notice that people often have favorite expressions and certain rhythms to their speech. Sometimes someone may not wait to talk until the other person is finished. Sometimes they misunderstand one another. How can you use these speech patterns in the dialogue you write?



ADDING COLOR AND MOOD

Characters may not always speak in complete sentences. Yet just a few words may add lots of color and mood to a tale.

In “The Wind and the Sun,” these two natural forces argue about who is stronger. They compete to make a shepherd remove his cloak. Fierce winds only lead the man to clutch his cloak more tightly. Then the sun begins to blaze:



Feeling the sudden warmth, the shepherd loosened his cloak. As he walked on, he became hotter and hotter under the burning sun. “I can’t go on in this heat,” he said. So he threw his cloak aside and sat down in the shade of a spreading oak tree.

“Well?” said Sun, smiling.

“Poof!” snorted Wind.

“Phew!” said the shepherd. “It’s a glorious summer’s day!”

Michael Morpurgo, “The Wind and the Sun,” in *The McElderry Book of Aesop’s Fables*

The one-word statements of Sun and Wind communicate both Sun’s glee and Wind’s disgust. The shepherd’s “Phew!” communicates how tired he is and how good it feels to rest.

Sometimes a character misunderstands what is being said. Paul Rosenthal uses this kind of misunderstanding for further humor in a silly fable about mice, sheep, and boys:

The mouse was ready to scream. “That might be the moral of your fable, but that’s not the moral of this fable. Now, will you beat it.”

“Baa,” said the sheep.

“Not bleat it,” said the mouse impatiently, “beat it.”

Paul Rosenthal, “Of Mice and Boys,” in *Yo Aesop! Get a Load of These Fables*

Sheep gives a bleating “baa” because that is what sheep do—and because the words “beat” and “bleat” sound confusingly alike.

CHAPTER 7: SCINTILLATING SPEECH

Follow convention

Dialogue is usually written according to certain rules. Often a new paragraph begins with each new speaker. You already know that what a person said is enclosed in quotation marks and usually followed or preceded by a tag such as “he said” or “she said.” Sometimes, to give the sense of a real conversation, writers place these tags in the middle of a sentence. This placement adds another rhythm to the conversation, making it more lifelike.

Helen Ward uses interrupted conversations to show the cricket’s attempts to excuse his laziness and the busy ant’s low opinion of the cricket:



“I was busy . . . ,” whined the cricket (and he had to admit it sounded a little silly on a frosty morning), “ . . . singing.”

The ant of course was unimpressed. “Then MAYBE . . .” he said acidly. “ . . . YOU SHOULD DANCE ALL WINTER.” And with that, he turned his back on the cricket and marched into the nest.
Helen Ward, “A Time to Dance,” in *Unwitting Wisdom: An Anthology of Aesop’s Fables*

Now it’s your turn

Compress your dialogue

Try removing tags such as “he said” or “she shouted” from your dialogue. Does the pace of the conversation seem more natural? Does this pace better suit the mood and purpose of the scene? Can you still identify who is speaking? Some

scenes work better with compressed dialogue that has no tags. If you cannot tell who is speaking without tags, you may want to work more to develop each character’s voice.

USE DIFFERENT VOICES

Writing dialogue is a challenge even for experienced, skilled writers. Remember that the characters should not sound like you! How characters speak often reveals a great deal about them.

Here are examples of how characters' speech differs in rhythm, vocabulary, and emotional tone.

Speech that reflects nervousness:

Bernard the bee stutters when he thinks about trying to swim in a birdbath:

"Wa-wa-wa-water?" Bernard stammered. The water looked quite cold and quite wet.

Julius Lester, "How Bernard the Bee Lost His Buzz," in *Ackamarackus: Julius Lester's Sumptuously Silly Fantastically Funny Fables*

Modern slang:

Modern slang reveals Pigeon's boastful personality and attitude toward other creatures:

"Get a life!" scoffed the pigeon. With a great flapping and fluttering, he soared into the air. "Watch me," he cried to the ant. "You'll see how a real pro gets lunch."

Paul Rosenthal, "Feathers, Frisbees, & Flying Salami," in *Yo, Aesop! Get a Load of These Fables*



Tips and techniques

Use speech characteristics such as a stutter, animal noise, or accent to clearly identify characters, especially minor ones.

Tips and techniques

Watch out! Slang may not suit a fable set long ago or faraway. In a silly or modern fable, though, slang may be a useful tool.

CHAPTER 7: SCINTILLATING SPEECH

Speech that communicates intense emotion:

The frustrated fox bites off each word with angry emphasis:

The shadows had lengthened by the time the fox finally turned his back on the grapes, muttering to himself that they were undoubtedly
THE NASTIEST,

MOST HORRID,

DISGUSTING,

REVOLTING,

INEDIBLE,

INDIGESTIBLE

*and very probably the SOUREST
grapes he had ever had the pleasure
of NOT eating!*

Helen Ward, "Sour Grapes," in *Unwitting Wisdom:
An Anthology of Aesop's Fables*

Tips and techniques

Use capital letters and placement of words on the page to indicate strong emotions and how they affect speech rhythms and volume.

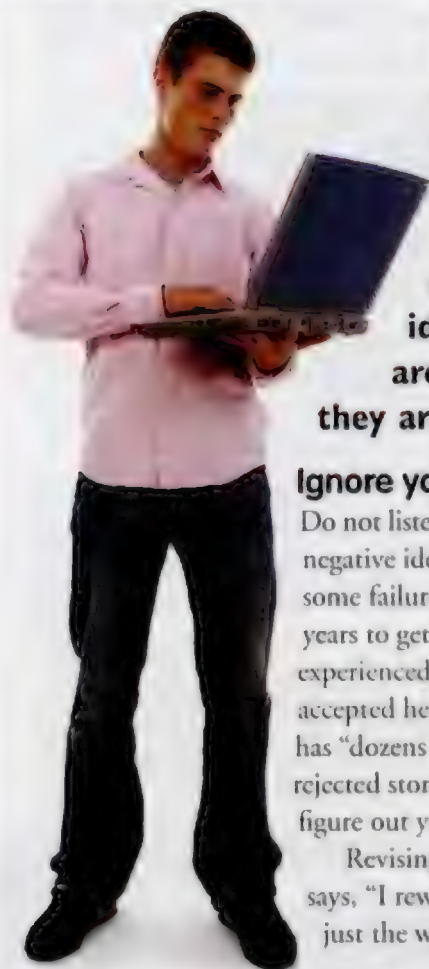
Speech that reflects a creature's real-life sounds:

Lion roars when he wants to get the attention of excited creatures:

"RRRAAARRRGHHH!" roared the lion. "Wait. You all ran without finding out what was frightening you. Remember that, next time something scares you. If you'll only stop and see what it is, you may find out that there's nothing really to be afraid of at all."

Rafe Martin and Ed Young, *Foolish Rabbit's Big Mistake*





BEAT WRITER'S BLOCK

Even talented, professional writers sometimes fall prey to that terrible force called writer's block. It happens when a writer is stuck for words or ideas in a story. Never fear! There are ways to conquer this force—and they are at your command!

Ignore your inner critic

Do not listen to that inner voice that might be whispering negative ideas about your writing. All writers experience some failures and rejection. It took Saviour Pirota four years to get his first book published. Candace Fleming experienced three years of rejection letters before a publisher accepted her first story. This successful author says she still has “dozens of projects that never see the light of day ... rejected stories, stories that lead nowhere, stories I can't quite figure out yet.”

Revising work is part of every writer's life. Jon Scieszka says, “I rewrite and rewrite and rewrite until I get the story just the way I like it.”

Write, write, write

If you have been following the writer's golden rule (writing regularly and often), you already have a powerful weapon against writer's block.

Julius Lester writes about three hours every day. Many writers set aside a certain number of hours each day to write.

They are happy with whatever number of pages their daily writing produces. Often writers find that taking a break or thinking about a writing problem in a different environment helps.

Learn the tricks of the trade

Writing may seem lonely. Some writers find that the cure to this loneliness is belonging to a writers group. You could even start your own! Groups meet regularly in person, or “writing buddies” meet on the Internet. These groups help fight writer’s block by sharing ideas, experiences, and even goals. Candace Fleming says she has a “few trusted writers” with whom she shares her work. Unlike many people in such groups, Fleming does not share her work until “it is as polished as it can be.”



Role play

Another way to beat loneliness as a writer is to involve your family or friends. Turn your writing problem into a game with them. Give each person a character role from your fable, and see what ideas and dialogue turn up!



Tips and techniques

To get fresh ideas, take a break in a different environment to think through a writing problem. Or just take a break!

Now it's your turn

A character-building activity

Stuck in the middle of your fable? Get to know your characters better. Ask yourself what makes a character angry, happy,

or embarrassed. Now have this character write you a letter complaining about the fable or other characters.

CHAPTER 9: THE NEXT STEP

WHAT NOW?

Congratulations! Completing your own fable is a fantastic achievement. You have learned a lot about writing and probably about yourself, too. You are now ready to take the next step in creating wonderful stories.



Another fable?

While writing your fable, you might have gotten ideas for another one. Perhaps you completed a traditional tale and now want to try a silly one. Perhaps you wrote your first fable from the hero's point of view but now want to try one told by the villain or a minor character. Perhaps writing a fable set in modern times or a different culture interests you.

Tips and techniques

Read several versions of your favorite Aesop's fable to see new possibilities in retelling an old tale.

How about a sequel?

Is there more to tell about the characters in your completed fable? Maybe further adventures await them in a sequel.

Elizabeth Dahlie thinks that her Bernelly and Harriet may be “planning a trip to Paris.”

British illustrator-author Helen Ward continues to write about beasts. Many of the animals in her book *The Boat* are ones typically found in Dorset, England, where she lives. Her most recent book, *Varmints*, is set in the future.



Tips and techniques

Use the setting of a fable you have written or read for the setting of your next story.

Now it's your turn

Imagine that!

Brainstorm your next story on paper. Think of a fable you enjoyed reading. List five things that might have happened to the hero or creatures after or even before the events described in the tale. Do not

worry about punctuation or grammar as you jot down ideas. Repeat this process with another fable. When you are done, you may have found the characters and plot for your next writing project.

LEARN FROM THE AUTHORS

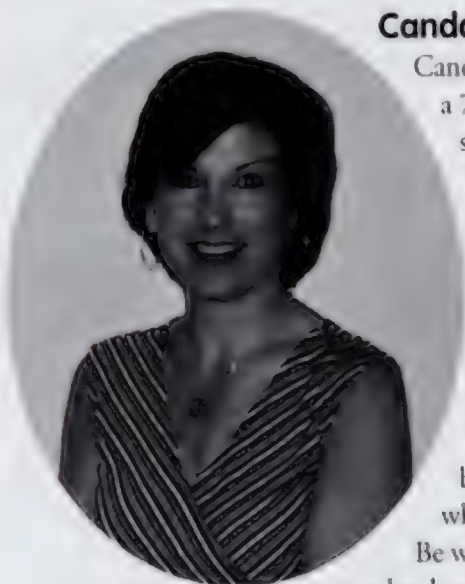
You can learn a great deal from the advice of successful writers. Almost all will tell you that expecting success without hard work and occasional failure is foolish. Yet even though few writers earn enough from their books to make a living, they value their ability to create and communicate through written words.



Candace Fleming

Candace Fleming's parents encouraged her as a 7-year-old to write down her ideas and stories. Yet she did not think of becoming a professional author until she grew up and had her own children. In college, she majored in history.

Fleming says she gets her "ideas from everywhere—the books I read, the television shows I watch, the conversations I hear on the checkout line at the grocery store. ... But then, to make the story better, you change it." Her advice to kids who want to write: "Read a lot. Write a lot. Be willing to change your work. But above all else, have fun doing it."



Demi

Author and illustrator Demi is a Buddhist. Besides Buddhist fables, she has written a biography of Buddha and of Muhammad, the great prophet of another religion, Islam. In a recent interview, Demi said she wants to write "books with meaning" because there "is a need for more meaning" in our lives. She also wants kids and families to "understand different cultures."

Demi, who was born Charlotte Dumaresq Hunt, is married to Tze-si Jesse Huang, who is of Chinese heritage. Demi calls her husband her "built-in research center" when she wants to research Jataka fables and Chinese folk tales. The award-winning author has also traveled to China to gather information for her books.

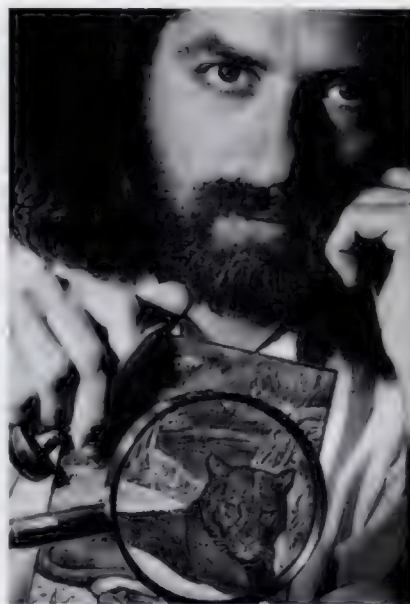
Christopher Wormell

Even though he has written and illustrated 10 successful books, the income from writing is not enough for Christopher Wormell to live on. He works in England as a wood engraver and freelance illustrator for design and advertising companies. He did not attend college, but he studied painting and linoleum cutting with his father, John. Wormell's early jobs included working as a street sweeper, a factory worker, a postman, and a handyman. He did not begin earning a living from art until he was 26 years old.

Wormell admits that writing is hard. He says he loves rewriting "if I've thought of a better way of writing something, but if I haven't (which is mostly) I hate it."

He says, "Ideas ... never seem to come when you sit and try to think of them." Sometimes a possible first line or title inspires him to write. At other times being someplace like a beach or forest or hearing someone say something sparks Wormell's imagination.

He advises new writers to "always write for yourself. Write stories that interest and excite you. ... If it doesn't excite you, it certainly won't excite anyone else."



PREPARE YOUR WORK

Let your fable rest in your desk or on a shelf for several weeks. Then when you read it through, you will have fresh eyes to spot any flaws.

Edit your work

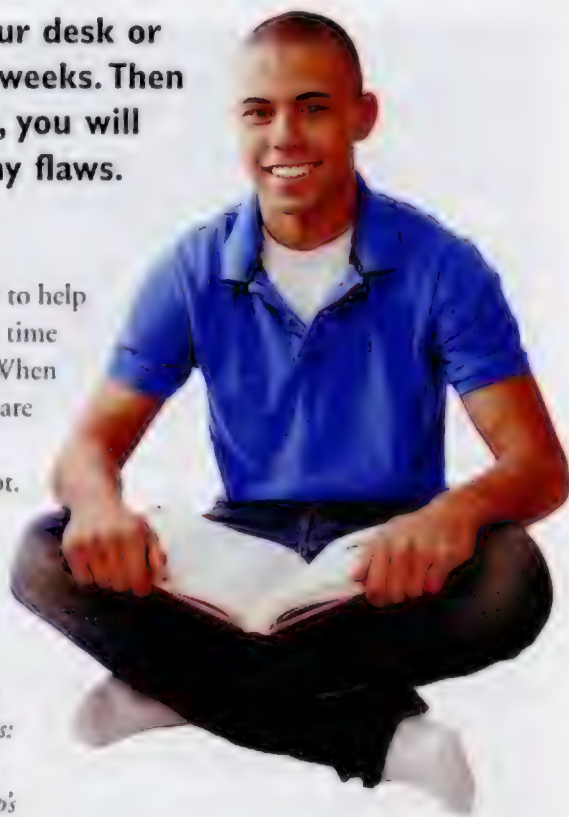
Reading your work aloud is one way to help make the writing crisper. Now is the time to check spelling and punctuation. When the fable is as good as it can be, prepare a final handwritten or computer-printed copy. This is your manuscript.

Think of a title

Great titles capture the reader's interest. They not only indicate the subject of the book but make the reader want to learn more about it. *Mice, Morals, and Monkey Business: Lively Lessons from Aesop's Fables* is a more compelling title than just *Aesop's Fables*. Sometimes titles also indicate the author's voice. Paul Rosenthal's *Yo, Aesop! Get a Load of These Fables* reflects the joking way the writer retells traditional fables and creates new ones.

Be professional

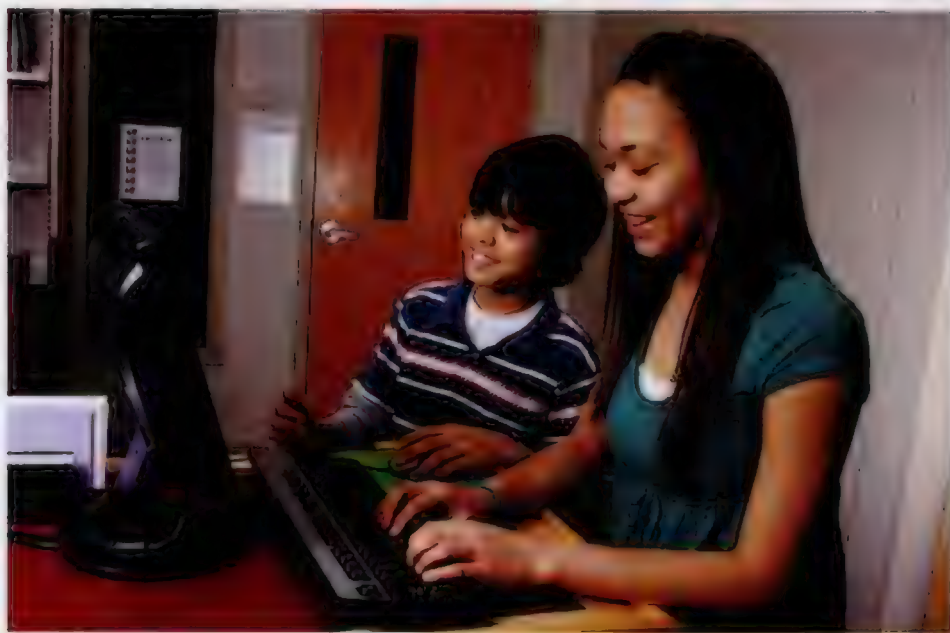
If you have a computer, you can give your manuscript a professional presentation. Manuscripts should always be printed on one side of white paper, with wide margins and double spacing. Pages should be numbered, and a new chapter should start on a new page. You should include your title as a header on the top of each page. At the front, you should have a title page with your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.



Make your own book

If your school has its own computer lab, why not use it to publish your fable or collection of fables? A computer will let you choose your own font (print style) or justify the text (making margins even, like those on some professionally printed pages). When you have typed and saved the fable to a file, you can use the spelling and grammar checker, or move sections around using the cut-and-paste tool, which saves a lot of rewriting. A word-processing or graphics program will let you design and print a cover for the book, too.

Having the fable on a computer file also means you can print a copy whenever you need one or revise the whole tale if you want to.



Tips and techniques

Always make a copy of your fable before you give it to others to read. Otherwise, if they lose it, you may have lost all your valuable work.

REACH YOUR AUDIENCE

The next step is to find an audience for your fable. Family members or classmates may be receptive. Members of a community group such as a Girl Scout troop or a senior citizens center might like to read your work. Or you may want to share your work through a Web site, a literary magazine, or a publishing house.



Some places to publish your fable

Several magazines and writing Web sites accept stories from young authors. Some give writing advice and run regular competitions. Each site has its own rules about submitting work, so remember to read these carefully. Here are two more ideas:

- Send your fable to your school newspaper.
- Watch your local newspaper or magazines for writing competitions you could enter.

Finding a publisher

Study the market to find out which publishers publish fables. Addresses of publishers and information about whether they accept submissions can be found in writers handbooks in your local library and on the Web. Remember that manuscripts that haven't been asked for or paid for by a publisher—unsolicited manuscripts—are rarely published. Always enclose a short letter explaining what you have sent. Add a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want your tale to be returned.

Writer's tip

Don't lose heart if an editor rejects your fable. See this as a chance to make your work better and try again. Remember, having your work published is wonderful, but it is not the only thing.

Being able to write a fable is an accomplishment that will delight the people you love. Talk about it with your brother or sister. Read it to your grandfather. Find your audience.

Some final words

You are now a member of a great storytelling tradition. People around the world have told fables for generations. You have shown that you, too, can write a tale that entertains while it also teaches a lesson about wise or foolish behavior. With this success and knowledge, you are ready to set out on the next fabulous adventure in your life!

Read! Write!

And keep your sense of wonder and glee alive.



CHAPTER 10: FIND OUT MORE

Glossary

back story—history of characters and events that happened before the story begins

chapter synopsis—outline that describes briefly what happens in a chapter

cliff-hanger—nail-biting moment that ends a chapter or scene of a story

dramatic irony—when the reader knows something the characters do not

editing—removing all unnecessary words from a story, correcting errors, and rewriting the text until the story is the best it can be

editor—person at a publishing house who finds new books to publish and advises authors on how to improve their stories by telling them what needs to be added, cut, or rewritten

first-person viewpoint—viewpoint that allows a single character to tell the story as if he or she had written it; readers feel as if that character is talking directly to them

foreshadowing—dropping hints of coming events or dangers that are essential to the outcome of the story

genre—category of writing characterized by a particular style, form, or content

manuscript—book or article typed or written by hand

metaphor—figure of speech that paints a word picture; calling a man “a mouse” is a metaphor from which we learn in one word that the man is timid or weak, not that he is actually a mouse

motive—reason a character does something

narrative—telling of a story

omniscient viewpoint—viewpoint of an all-seeing narrator who can describe all the characters and tell readers how they are acting and feeling

plot—sequence of events that drive a story forward; the problems that the hero must resolve





point of view—eyes through which a story is told

publisher—person or company that pays for an author's manuscript to be printed as a book and that distributes and sells the book

pun—play on words involving the deliberate confusion of similar words or phrases

sequel—story that carries an existing one forward

simile—saying something is like something else; a word picture, such as “clouds like frayed lace”

synopsis—short summary that describes what a story is about and introduces the main characters

theme—main idea that the story addresses, such as good versus evil or the importance of truth; a story can have more than one theme

third-person viewpoint—viewpoint that describes the events of the story through a single character's eyes

unsolicited manuscripts—manuscripts that are sent to publishers without being requested; these submissions usually end up in a “slush pile,” where they might stay a long time before being read

writer's block—writer's feeling that he or she can no longer write or has no more ideas

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information

Visit your local libraries and make friends with the librarians. They can direct you to useful sources of information, including magazines that publish young people's short fiction. You can learn your craft and read great stories at the same time.

Librarians will also know whether any published authors are scheduled to speak in your area. Many authors visit schools and offer writing workshops. Ask your teacher to invite a favorite author to speak at your school.

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Write Your Own Legend
Write Your Own Mystery Story
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Write Your Own Tall Tale

Read more fables

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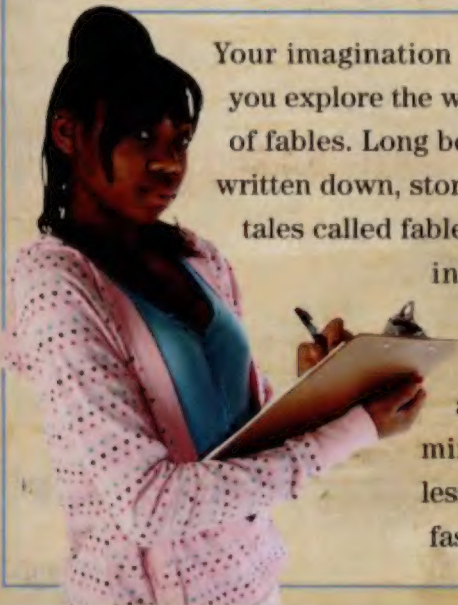




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